

Dakkhan hai nagina anguthi hai jag: Imagining the Deccan in Early Urdu Poetry

Abstract for ICEMLNI

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Despite its close association with North India, the earliest instances of an Urdu literary culture are to be found in the Deccan. There, the language was cultivated by a number of courts in the seventeenth century, most prominently in Golkonda. The most celebrated Urdu works of this period stem from the reign of Quli Qutb Shah (r. 1580-1611), himself perhaps the most remarkable Urdu poet of the early modern period. It was under his patronage that one of the most celebrated works of early Urdu literature, the *masnavi Qutb Mushtari* (1609), was written by the poet laureate Mulla Wajhi (d. 1640). The hero of this 'dastan-like' poem is the king himself, who must travel to Bengal to find his true love. To complete his quest to marry Mushtari, Qutb journeys from Hyderabad to Bengal, encountering a host of dragons, demons and fairies along the way. After arriving there, he convinces Mushtari that Hyderabad is the greatest region in all the world and brings her back to celebrate their marriage. While scholars praise the *masnavi* for its literary accomplishments, much of its fame derives from the belief that the work is a 'poetically disguised' account of Quli Qutb Shah's love affair with a local courtesan called Bhagmati, and from the dexterous intertwining of Deccani history with mythological scenes drawn from both Persian and Indian literature. Through an examination of the *Qutb Mushtari*, this paper examines the nascent use of Urdu poetry as a part of courtly literature. It focuses particularly on the poem's representation of the geographical and political cartography of India, which locates Golkonda at its center: *Dakkhan hai nagina anguthi hai jag* (if the world is a ring, the Deccan is its jewel).